Islamabad, October 24, 2021 – World Polio Day 2021 was marked by the World Health Organization (WHO) along with all the Global Polio Eradication Initiative partners, led by Rotary International, in all parts of the country with various fundraisers and unique events. This day gave WHO the opportunity to highlight Pakistan's diligent efforts over the past three years, bringing the wild poliovirus case count to a historic low, and mapping the road ahead.

“The transmission of the wild poliovirus in Pakistan is at its lowest point ever however we are still a long way from the finish line,” stressed Dr Palitha Mahipala WHO Representative in Pakistan during this World Polio Day celebration remarks.

In June 2021, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) launched the Polio Eradication Strategy 2022–2026 to deliver on a promise made 33 years ago at the 41st World Health Assembly. Since the declaration to eradicate polio was adopted in 1988, the world has achieved a 99.9% reduction in wild poliovirus transmission. Yet, persistent challenges remain to end all forms of polio.

Dr Mahipala added, “This year’s theme is very fitting for Pakistan; as the world is watching us, we need to deliver on this promise of a polio-free Pakistan by all means necessary. I urge all parents to continue vaccinating their children during the campaigns to increase immunity levels. It is the only way to get rid of the poliovirus.”

To see an end to polio, every child must receive the life-saving vaccine to protect them and reduce the opportunities for the virus to thrive. The polio programme has had long-standing challenges such as vaccine hesitancy, insecurity for front-line workers and of late, the COVID-19 pandemic. To address this, collective efforts are needed by all with authorities, civil society members, the private sector and health workers.

On World Polio Day, WHO joined Rotarians from all over Pakistan, and the world, to call for commitment to delivering on a promise for a polio-free world. "The end of polio is now well within reach,” stressed Dr Mahipala. “This World Polio Day, I applaud the exemplary efforts of the Government of Pakistan and the polio programme staff that have done a heroic job of driving the poliovirus out of Pakistan. It has taken significant hard work and dedication to reducing the wild polio case count from 147 in 2019 to only one so far in 2021,” he added.

The achievement of the 1988 promise will depend on the various factors including the further strengthening of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) within the context of sustainable access to vaccination services. In November, the polio programme and EPI will join forces to vaccinate close to 90 million children against rubella, measles and polio in one of the world’s largest vaccination campaigns to date.

As Pakistan enters its tough the last mile of polio eradication, Dr Mahipala urged full commitment for polio eradication. Pakistan needs to capitalize on the current progress to be put firmly on the right track to give millions of children the gift of a polio-free world.

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